The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 4 NOVEMBER 22, 1939

DEAR MEMBER,—I said in the preliminary number that it would be one of the main functions of the *News-Letter* to tell our readers about what is being done and attempted for the realisation of the purpose of God in human society. To do this as fully as we should like we need time to develop our sources of information. Moreover the period since the war began has been largely one of adjustment to changed conditions and new efforts have hardly had time yet to take definite shape.

THE IONA COMMUNITY

In the meantime, let me say something about an enterprise which is as full of promise as any of which I know. Many of you have listened to Dr. George Macleod on the microphone and have at least heard of the community he has founded at Iona. The considerations which led to the new venture were, in the main, two. The first was the fact that nearly a quarter of the population of Scotland is moving into new areas devoid of churches. The demands of a newly planted church in a large population can hardly be met by a single minister, and there is much to be said for providing in city parishes, old or new, a staff of ministers having a variety of different gifts. The second need is to provide a technique in fellowship. The Iona Community aims at meeting both these needs. The plan is to give to those who have completed their training for the ministry the opportunity of further training alongside of artisans and other laymen at Iona during the summer months, and to place them in winter at the disposal of large parishes.

The founding of the Community last year created no small stir in Scotland. When it was learned that a handful of young men composed of intending ministers and masons and carpenters proposed to live in community in Iona under a rule of life and worship—in the mornings to analyse, with the intention of combating, the paganism and secularism of Scotland, and in the afternoons to rebuild the ruined conventual buildings of the old abbey—the news awakened nation-wide interest. Some saw in it a harking back to mediævalism or a revolt against sound Presbyterian order. Others were puzzled like the old parishioner who stopped Dr. Macleod in the street and said, "Mon, I'm vexed to hear ye're gaun awa frae us to be a Trapeze monk." Many, however, hailed it with enthusiasm as a courageous and creative experiment such as the times demand from the Church. It awakened the romantic chord in the Scottish character, which never sounds so purely as when it is touched by high religion. The imagination was stirred by the thought of the precincts of Iona Abbey being gradually rebuilt by the joint labours of minister and mason to become again what it once was —not merely a church but a living home of Christian fellowship and a source of Christian missionary ardour. The plan is undergoing necessary adaptations to meet war conditions, and there will be more to report about it later in the *News-Letter*.

THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES ON THE CONTINENT

I have a letter from Dr. Adolf Keller containing information about the evangelical Churches on the Continent.

Poland.—The Churches in Poland are for the most part hidden in a fog which conceals tragic need, loneliness and unknown sufferings. The Lutheran Polish Church is entirely broken and its leading bishop a refugee somewhere in the Baltic countries. The German Evangelical Church in Galicia and the Ukrainian Evangelical Church have come under Bolshevik rule and are exposed to the same treatment which Churches have suffered in Russia, where of the two hundred evangelical pastors at work before the Revolution not one is left to-day in the sphere of his former activity. The German Evangelical Church in the area assigned to Germany is trying to reconstruct its scattered parishes and reorganise its activities.

France.—In France the relatively small Protestant community has to grapple with a vast refugee problem. Nearly half a million people have been evacuated from the frontier departments and a considerable proportion of these are Protestants. More than fifty pastors have had to leave their parishes and remove with their congregations to the interior of France. Not only has the whole life of the Church to be reorganised in new centres, but there is the greatest need for medical supplies, literature and clothing. The population had to leave at the shortest notice in full summer with such belongings as could be carried in the hand, and both adults and children are without adequate protection to meet the cold of winter.

Germany.—In Germany the difficulties arising from the Church conflict have been increased by the mobilisation of many of the pastors. In a country as small as Württemburg there are three hundred pastors in arms. In some areas the whole work of the parish has been put on a new basis. Groups come together for the reading of the Bible and for prayer. Laymen make themselves responsible for the work in the Sunday school and in Bible classes, and there is a new emphasis on religious education by parents, and in particular by mothers. In the army a number of the higher officers show a friendly attitude towards religious services.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

One of our members has written to me carrying further what I said last week about the need not only of conserving liberty, but of creating it. He asks what the fundamental reason is for doing either. Is it because we value our own liberty? He suggests that this is not the basic reason and that the only adequate one is that we value each other's liberty. "Liberty is only safe when each man defends his neighbour's. I hate the phrase about the price of liberty being eternal vigilance. It may be half the truth, but it hides the half that matters. The price of liberty is eternal loving of your neighbour as yourself and eternal hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Nothing else will do. That is why we are still so far from free. Unless you love your neighbour you don't care about his opportunities, and unless you hunger and thirst after righteousness you don't know what opportunities to want for him."

THE YOUTH OF THE NATION

Have any of you been able to do anything yet about the needs of those between the ages of fourteen and eighteen? Have you initiated any enquiries? I shall welcome information in view of the article which is in preparation on the subject.

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

Issued under the auspices of
the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life.

EDITOR: J. H. OLDHAM

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THE purpose of the News-Letter is to meet a widespread need for help in facing the baffling problems which confront the Christian in the world to-day. The present emergency calls for a concerted effort on the part of Christians to understand the religious meaning of the experiences through which we are passing so that we may find the way to right action.

The News-Letter seeks to provide a means whereby the results of this common thinking may reach and stimulate as wide a constituency as possible.

Issue No. 0 was published on October 18th. Issue No. 1 on November 1st, and thereafter weekly on Wednesdays.

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THE NEWS-LETTER

Three weeks after the issue of *News-Letter* No. 1 the number of our members is only a few short of 5,000. This is a good start. The fact that so many should have subscribed without waiting for us to disclose the full range of our programme shows that many have been waiting for this sort of thing. We shall do our utmost to fulfil their expectations.

This support has encouraged us to take an important decision. We want to try and double our present membership by the New Year. A membership of 10,000 would more than double our present resources and provide us with more adequate means for gathering news and keeping in touch with the growing number of groups and individuals now writing to us. We could give you better service by improving our technical equipment. Can you help us? Some of you may not yet have made up your mind about the *News-Letter* or may not be able to take any action. But many of you, as we know from your letters, are already enthusiastic and are doing a great deal to increase our membership. A bishop writes to me that he is setting himself to interest individually a number of laymen in his diocese. Can we make a combined effort in the next three weeks? A letter or postcard from you making your own suggestions will be most welcome. Let us know whether we can help you in any way in the common effort to widen the circle of our membership.

It seems to me vital for the ends which the *News-Letter* seeks to serve that it should have as many links as possible with the army, navy and air-force, where a large proportion of the youth of the nation is at present to be found. I am sure that after reading this week's supplement you will agree. I enclose a second copy of this number for you to send to a friend serving in the forces whom you think it might interest. If you have no close link with the army, navy or air-force, you can pass the extra copy on to a friend in some other walk of life.

Christmas is not far away. Will you consider whether a subscription to the *News-Letter* is a present which some of your friends might like?

THE ULTIMATE OBJECTIVE

The *News-Letter* is only a means to a greater end. That end is the growth of a body of people dedicated to the task of creating a new order of society. At this stage in human history the choice before mankind lies between Communism, Fascism, and something more difficult to define but offering for most of us, however indistinct its outlines, the only satisfactory alternative—a community of free persons united under the rule of law, directing its activities increasingly to Christian ends and leavened by Christian insight, values and standards. That the choice lies between one or other of these three forms of society seems to me an inescapable fact.

But much of the talk about what is going to happen if this country wins the war, far from heartening me, fills me with misgiving. I cannot share the Prime Minister's optimism when he said in the peroration of his speech at the Mansion House that he cherished " the firm conviction that we shall live to see the foundation laid of a new world in which freedom and humanity will have superseded oppression and the rule of force." That, of course, is what we all desire. But if our thought stops there, we shall never get it. There are as yet few signs that the democracies have begun to face the fundamental issues. Are the democratic peoples — are we and France and America—living in the manner necessary to create the world we desire? Are we not, morally and spiritually, unfitted to achieve it? Most of the utterances of our leaders seem to take for granted that, if we defeat in war the evil and sinister systems

we are opposing, the rest will follow as a matter of course. There is little evidence of an understanding of the deeper forces which are shaping the course of history, of the radical changes that are necessary, of the gigantic tasks to which we must address ourselves and of the price that has to be paid for a different order of society from that which now exists. The vital question which concerns us is whether the Christian faith can confront men with these fundamental issues in such a way as to lead them to real decisions. It is because the Christian forces, spiritually, morally, intellectually and numerically, are unequal to so colossal an undertaking that the first necessity seemed to be to create a central rallying-point and to try to pool our available resources.

THE SUPPLEMENT

Bishop Neville Talbot served as a soldier in the South African war and was a chaplain through the whole of the last war. He was for thirteen years Bishop of Pretoria and is now the vicar of St. Mary, Nottingham.

OUR COLLABORATORS

The first conference of our collaborators was held on November 15th at Lambeth Palace. Many suggestions were made at it which will bear fruit in the future.

Our collaborators are all giving active help in the *News-Letter*, bringing to it the gifts of their special knowledge and experience. They have no collective responsibility for its contents, nor are they individually committed to what appears in it. There exists among them the greatest diversity of view on many matters—a fact of the greatest advantage to our members, since it gives to each of us the opportunity of enlarging our limited individual outlook by learning from others, and not least from those with whom we may disagree. The names of the present collaborators are:

The Archbishop of York
The Rev. M. E. Aubrey
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Prof. Ernest Barker
Canon F. R. Barry
Dr. S. M. Berry
Henry Brooke, M.P.
The Rev. Henry Carter
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Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

20, Balcombe Street,
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HE CHRISTIAN
EWS-LETTER
VEMBER 22nd, 1939

The Supplement
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RELIGION AND THE ARMY IN THE LAST WAR

DEAR JOE,—What a ferment of revived memories is set up in me by your request to write on "Religion and the Army in the Last War"! I feel like the largest of bottles with a very small neck, and with its effervescent contents well "up." But more of that in a moment.

It is right to recall to-day the things that were seen—as it seems—yesterday, when the soul of young Britain and its spiritual condition, as fully represented by the enormously expanded Army, were exposed and illuminated by the glare of the Great War.

It seems, as I say, only yesterday. For the years intervening between 1918 and 1939 seem to be strangely but really telescoped; and though it cannot be enough just to allow those years to drop into an *oubliette*, yet all that was there to be seen and learnt from at the end of the last war is still here for us to assimilate now.

THE BOTTLE

I return to that "bottle." The one thing which I am quite sure it is worth while my writing and others reading is that there is a great bottle to be decanted, not just my bottle, but "The Bottle." I refer to *The Army and Religion*: *An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (Macmillan). This stout volume was the outcome of the devoted work of an exceedingly able and representative Committee of religious leaders, clerical and lay, old and young, which extracted, so to say, meteorological reports on the religious condition of the Army from every conceivable first-hand authority, high and low, who was on service in France and elsewhere. The book had the outstanding advantage that, while its catchment-area was as wide as the millions in arms, its outlet (to use the language appropriate to an irrigation dam) was cut and engineered by one master mind, and that the mind of a man of notorious prophetic fire and vision and ability—Dr. David Cairns. Yet I doubt whether the Church in general really took notice of the book.

There is one thing, then, that I want to say—*Get the book*. I say it with all the urgency that beats through the old words: "Get wisdom, get understanding. . . . Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom: Yea, with all thou hast *gotten, get understanding*."

Comb the second-hand booksellers and get *The Army and Religion*. Take it down from the neglected bookshelf and blow the dust off it, and read it and re-read it.

THE CHURCH UNDER FIRE

That is what I would say to the Church as represented by the readers of the *Christian News-Letter*. For the fires of criticism of the Church, with which the book is aglow, should burn them—for it is the Church and not just "the boys" who were under the fire of the book's reconnaissance. If *The Army and Religion* exposed a dire poverty of understanding of the Christian Faith—a poverty in salient contrast with their unconscious Christian excellencies—in the young men of our nation, it exposed a more dire failure of the Church to teach and interpret and exhibit that faith. Here, as so often, it was the people seeming to sit in judgment upon the spiritual state of others who were really under judgment. (Compare Europeans in South Africa for ever discussing the native problem, while, all the while, they themselves are the problem.)

AN UNFULFILLED EXPECTATION

There was, I remember, a certain expectation among people of piety at home that there would be a great revival of religion "at the front." "Now that the young men, commonly so absent from church, are face to face with

death" . . . so some folk surmised. This expectation was not fulfilled. It did little justice to the nature of modern war as inimical to spirituality. War is very fatiguing and materialising and (to coin a word) physicalising. It benumbs and hardens and deadens the soul—at any rate, after a time. At first it may act differently, but as it is prolonged its consuming character emerges. It uses up and does little to create. It induces an unthinking fatalism. Indeed, it encourages the suppression of thought. Thinking, still more brooding, is bad for nerves. The famous sergeant-major was right: "'Twould never do, sir, to let the men take this 'ere war seriously."

YET—"IT MAKES ONE THINK"

And yet that is no sooner out of one's pen than memories spring up of men saying, "It makes one think." There was, of course, and in the nature of things, religious reaction far and wide to the tremendous environment of war. There were few who by its pressure did not feel impelled towards God and towards dependence upon Him. That was most natural. I found it most easy to say my prayers in the Ypres salient.

But what was the value of all that? I think that for some it meant a real discovery of God and a turning-point in their lives. A man may never be the same again after once speaking to Him. But in the main and for most men, there was something deeply uncomfortable in such "religion at the front." It was vulnerable to the taunt that it was "the religion of the wind-up." I never felt brave or insensitive enough to endorse such scorn. Yet, on analysis, this most natural reaction to the close neighbourhood of death could not be freed from fearfulness and self-regard. As such it went counter to the virtue of soldiers. It was a long way from heroism. It was certainly a great complication for "the padre" that he and what he represented were associated with it. Men supposed that he would exploit it.

UNCONSCIOUS CHRISTIANITY

But I hasten on to say that there was much more in our "boys" than a disposition to find refuge with God in danger. What they were for the most part was wonderful. I hope I need not dilate on that. I hope that Donald Hankey's *The Student in Arms* is not forgotten. It gave classical expression to the grand Christian—albeit unconscious—qualities laid bare in the average man under the revealing stress of war. A deep trustfulness, an absence of self-concern, a willingness to help others, a "mateyness," a cheerfulness—what more shall I say? Christ, our dear Lord, was, we saw, there in the hearts of men, even though they did not know it. He *is* the great leaven, suffusing, influencing human nature. Men at their best are Christlike.

But, then, mark the significant phrases—"albeit unconscious" and "though they did not know it." What *was* in their hearts and minds about God, about Christ, about the life to come? Ah! how hard it was to answer this question accurately; how difficult to appraise the misty Theism, the real but hazy sense that death is not the end, which was generally there in men's souls. I do think that, with exceptions which made a considerable total, it was fair to diagnose the generality of men's religious state in such terms—misty, vague, half-conscious. It was accurate to see much Christianity in men who were not possessed by Christian convictions.

If so, then there was an absence in most men of a spiritual and moral and intellectual equipment wherewith to grapple either with the tremendous challenge of the Hell of War to belief in God, or with the intensified strain of temptation induced by war. As regards morality, there was something ominous—though some made light of it—in the great prevalence of obscene bad language. The inarticulate souls of men seemed noble; their articulate speech was commonly foul.

As regards the challenge to belief in God, there was little awareness that it is just there that the Gospel of God in Christ comes in. A vague Theism was shaken if not shattered by war's apparent confutation of God's control over things. There were not many, I think, who were rallied and re-encouraged by the great word of the Cross—God's victory there.

IF THAT IS CHRISTIANITY

All this clamoured for explanation. It drove not so much towards blaming the men as towards blaming the Church. It was plain that the Church's witness and teaching had not given to men generally a Christian conception of God, or a vision of the real and heroic personality of Christ, or an understanding of the positive and fighting character of Christian morality. Padres felt that if Christianity was what men thought it to be, they would never themselves have been Christians. And yet again and again in what they were, in what war exposed in them, "the

men," for all their haze and ignorance, were more Christian than they. Some padres never got over this. The grand, Christian quality seen in their fellow men bereft them of belief that human nature needs redemption. There is indeed in all this much need for furious thinking. I do not suppose the interval between this war and the last has diminished it. I wish I could think that the Church generally, and the clergy in particular, has taken to heart the manifestation in the last war of its failure to impart the faith that "overcomes the world."

THE UNHEARD-OF KINGDOM

The subject, of course, is far too big for discussion here. But I want to refer to the book again. I think that it lays its finger on a main feature of a tragic situation. The Christianity, which has in this degree and that been imparted, has not been the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The "wonderful" men had never heard of the Kingdom of God.

If this is so, then it does account for much. It throws light on the fact that few have really seen our Lord in His supreme crusade, that they do not know what it was that He lived and suffered and died for. It means that they do not see what fundamental questions about God and His reign were once and for all raised by His going to His death. And because they do not see that they are able to keep in one part of their minds some vague thoughts about "the One above"—"the Almighty," and in another part some idea of Jesus as a very good man who lived and died long ago. And for the same reason they do not know what the Church is for. They do not realise the romance, the breadth and greatness of its Crusade.

TURNED IT ON ITSELF

Average men in a great host manifested a marvellous capacity for unselfregarding and courageous—nay, heroic—service. It shone as a lovely radiance in the darkness of war. It is shining again to-day. Men get drawn out of themselves by devotion to a great cause. But Christianity as they conceive or dimly think of it seems to work the other way, to be chiefly a concern about personal salvation, and as such to be self-centred. And the Church seems to be turned in on itself and devoted to its own interests, with nothing to make tell upon this great world in its interest and potentiality, but also in its confusion and peril and need.

AMAZING MISSIONARY MEETINGS

In this connection the book has a startling testimony. At the great base camps in France, where great audiences could be assembled, what caught the keenest attention of masses of men? Addresses on the world mission of Christianity—in other words, missionary addresses! Who would have expected that? I must quote for once: "It came as a revelation to many of these men that Christianity is a live thing for live men. . . . Men are not playing for safety in these times. The mass of the men in the Army to-day are Socialists of some type or other, and it is an inspiration to be among them and to catch something of this eager spirit that 'is out to make a better and happier world.' And it is right here where they are at their best that the story of missions gets hold of them. Many men seem to have viewed Christianity as a religion accepted by people simply for their own welfare. It seems to have startled many to realise that in it there is call for the highest possible service for the good and welfare of all peoples."

THE CHRISTIANITY OF THE FUTURE

So the question comes right out to the fore whether the gospel of the Kingdom of God is not the treasure still to be found and for which all else may be sold by the Church. "The prayer of our Lord—that God's name is to be hallowed, His Kingdom come, or His Will be done, in earth as in heaven—is in truth the programme of the Christianity of the future." So says the book. Is it right? If not, why not?

Is it only a programme of world amelioration by dint of human effort and energy? Is it irreconcilable with the central importance of individual conversion and sanctification? Is it just "this-worldly"? Does it oust from its primary place the eternal order? Does it leave no room for the Church's adoration, for the hiding of the soul in the heavenly places with Christ in God? And so on.

The questions involve the grasping of the greatest nettle of difficulty to be found in the New Testament, namely, the disappointment of the expectation of the end of the world. Owing to this, did the Church have "to drop the Kingdom as a hot potato," and did she herself have, therefore, cuckoowise, to usurp the place of the Kingdom? Did she have to relegate the Kingdom to "Kingdom Come"?

I believe that answers to these questions are forthcoming and that they amount to a resounding endorsement of the book's contention—"The prayer of our Lord is in truth the programme of the Christianity of the future."

THE RECOVERED GOSPEL

I do think that the study of "Religion and the Army in the last war" makes it certain that Christianity, just in the shape and perspective in which it has come down to us, will never win the manhood of our (or any other) nation. But "the Christianity of the future" is more than future. It is, by God's mercy, here. It is here in the recovered and rediscovered Gospel of God and of the Reign of God, triumphant in His Christ the King. It goes deeper than anything for the Cross goes deeper than anything deeper than all the questions that can be asked about God or man or the world. And it can arrest, convict, convert, and employ the manhood, indeed the womanhood too, of this or any other nation. It is for the heroic in men and women. It is for them, and they for it.

Ever yours,

NEVILLE S. TALBOT,

BISHOP

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